

1/6/15  
Verse 88

Everything is real in itself; one who grasps the basic truth  
will understand all this as one;  
if not known introspectively,  
*maya's* great enmity certainly creates much confusion.

Free translation:

In fact, all that we encounter is real as such. The philosopher in his  
contemplation sees everything as belonging to one unitive  
principle. If this inner truth is not understood, tribulations multiply  
like the snares of a revengeful *maya*.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

All things are real enough; the philosopher, however  
Grasps all things here as One; when not viewed  
Through the inward eye, that great tribulation  
Which is *Maya*, yields much puzzlement, indeed!

The new year started off with a roar, with our largest  
gathering since the beginning of the study more than two years  
ago. And not just in volume—the benignant effect of our common  
contemplation has made for a maturation of the conversation.  
Visitor Colleen, who last came by in 2008, expressed appreciation  
for the degree of careful listening we evidenced. It reminded me  
that once upon a time there was a tendency for each person to have  
their own agenda and just be waiting for a chance to express it,  
without much bothering to listen to others, which caused the  
discussion to leap around from place to place. Now there is a more  
coherent flow, with due consideration for each one's ideas,  
followed by a gradual metamorphosis into new areas. It's a  
significant achievement for any group.

Another visitor who last attended in the 1990s, John, was appreciative of the practical focus of the subject matter. *That Alone* is not just abstruse philosophy; the content is routinely referred to people's current problems. One hallmark of the Gurukula is the conviction that philosophy is meaningless if it doesn't pertain to how we live, making it uniquely down to earth. In many places, "practical" means practicing this or that meditation technique until you miraculously change. Here helpful ideas are intentionally related to everyday life. They may be enhanced by contemplation and meditation, but they are perfectly straightforward and realistic. Nitya expresses this right out: "This is not just a verse for philosophers. Anyone who wishes for peace, joy and harmony in their daily life should know it."

For some time we have been closely examining the degree of reality in what we perceive and know, so it's gratifying to have our doubts removed at last, as this verse does. Lots of people are undone by the degree of unreality they experience, or are told they experience, and some even go mad. Narayana Guru must have anticipated the stress induced by this, so he takes a moment to bring us to our senses. Nitya puts it this way:

After such a minute study of all aspects of the Self and its indivisible aloneness, even when we come to the eighty-eighth verse of *Atmopadesa Satakam* the world has not disappeared. It persists, through all the reevaluations we have had. And we are the same people. We are engaged in the same kinds of activities, and we still react to each other the same way.

If the world persists must it be real? Is it real or not? Does it exist or not exist? Narayana Guru says have no quarrel—just take it for granted the world exists. Not only this world. Whatever there is. It's all okay. *Sakalavum ullatu*, everything is real.

After all, nailing down exactly what reality is is an endless task. We have better places to put our energies.

You can tell from the commentary that Nitya was addressing a much younger crowd of admiring students, sizzling with intense emotions. It's gratifying to note how the current class members ruefully recognized those chaotic states, but more as memories than as immanent predicaments. Most of us have had many years to inculcate the teachings in our lives, and it shows.

Which doesn't mean problems no longer arise. The drift of the class was initiated by Nancy, who is a paragon of steadiness under fire. She wondered exactly what the verse is telling us in terms of coping with hostile situations. We are asked to see the oneness within the world's diversity, but what exactly does that mean? What do we do when we don't understand why people are unhappy with us? The subject is often treated overly simplistically, holding that we should just tune out or walk away from conflicts. Yet if we are engaged with the world, as in business or family matters especially, walking away is a lose-lose proposition. We are not being directed by the gurus to sit in oneness and ignore multiplicity, but to embrace both at once. Since we already know otherness so well, our task is to reintroduce unity as the saving factor. Doing so brings about the win-win of mitigating our own suffering and simultaneously making us more competent to resolve other people's complaints about us.

Nitya asks, "What is wrong with seeing everything as many? Nothing. Then why this insistence on seeing everything as one?" He offers a reprise of sama and anya, sameness and otherness, which is a key element of the whole teaching. I feel that his explanation of this verse is a triumph of exegesis, about as close as words can get to lifting us out of the mire. After detailing how we are repeatedly caught by the three gunas, he elaborates:

That's why the Guru says if you are always seeing things as distinct and separate, you are in a world called anya. Sattva, with its attraction; rajah, with its infatuation; tamah, with its binding and darkness—this pattern will repeat again and again. So why don't you

turn to the other possibility, to sama? Sama is seeing everything as one.

Does this mean that everyone will blend into one common material? Not at all. You are only asked to see things differently. When you see things outside you experience confusion, and this leads you to maya's revenge. But just as you have eyes turned outward to see things and facts, you can cultivate an inward eye to see how one consciousness is transforming itself to become the knowledge of things and facts.

Nancy's dilemma resonated with everyone. We all feel the sting when things go wrong, and struggle to find a sensible way to cope. Don made an excellent contribution, suggesting that if we treat conflicts not as evidence of hostility but as aspects of an overarching context we are mutually participating in, we can deal with them much more successfully. It means holding ourselves open when our initial feelings urge us to close down and leave the scene or worse, bite back. The hurt feelings are especially acute when our integrity is challenged, which is not uncommon. Several people asserted that at that point you have to realize the other person is caught in anya and rejecting sama, which means their position is off kilter. We don't have to credit them as being all-wise and ourselves as culpable. The legitimacy of everyone should be beyond question, but we live in a society that makes hay by denigrating the opposition, where you don't have to propound a valid argument if you can just run the other person down.

If we can accurately discern the true motivation behind the other person's posture, we may be relieved of shouldering the blame and also be able to see how we can best respond to the real, rather than the often bizarrely exaggerated, issues. The other person may well be unaware of how they are distorting the situation. For instance, in business matters holding the money makes people feel like the masters, and so they might treat those they employ as mere servants. They may believe this allows them a wide latitude for delivering insults and making capricious

demands. But of course a highly skilled person would naturally take this as a demeaning insult, and their talents would be bottled up, unless they can see through the flimflam and hold to the essentials of the task. Nitya touches on this when he says:

You need to have an inside knowledge of the forms of transformation. This doesn't take you away from any external reality. Instead of seeing the external world as many disjunct, separate entities, you see it as organically related to the one common reality or beingness to which everything belongs.

So the oft-derided perspective that there is an underlying unity to existence is what saves the day. Absent it, life is a series of pitched battles, with every man and woman in it for themselves.

Colleen was perplexed by Nitya's exposition of different types of thinking:

This is a good time to remember that our thinking processes can be circular, linear or deep. When you worry, your thoughts go in vicious circles, which is why you can't easily get away from them. This is called *cinta* in Sanskrit, and is the worst kind of mental operation. In linear thinking you start with a statement, and then see what is connected or associated with it and where it leads to, before proceeding logically to the next item. You direct your thoughts with reason, called *vicara*. It's a better way of thinking, but often is somewhat limited.

With the third way of thinking, you don't allow your mind to run away. First you decide what your standpoint is. Next you look at the field and decide what its scope is. You have to decide not to be carried away by anything you have previously heard, not allowing any kind of memories to come and distract you. You just repeat what you hear and penetrate into the heart of it, so that you can have an intuitive grasp of its meaning. This is *manana*.

Colleen correctly recognized that the deep or dialectical pattern of thought is not useful to someone who is mentally unbalanced. It's true, and that's why I sometimes refer to this type of study as psychotherapy for the sane. There is a developmental progression implied in these three major thought patterns. The circular mode actually stems from something more like a focal point, and is the beginning of coherent mentation. We begin our mental development by drawing a one-to-one correspondence between what we perceive and our conceptual image of it. In mental illness there is an inability to establish a steady relationship between percepts and concepts, for a variety of reasons. Circular thinking is evidence of this inability, as the mind haphazardly orbits around but cannot reliably access the point of focus.

Once the mind is well grounded, a linear mode of thought becomes possible. Induction and deduction are linear, and form the basis of the academic orientation. They are like going from one dimension to two, a point to a line. Dialectical thinking is the way the mind can attain three dimensional or holistic stature, and that is where we are making our efforts in the class. More on this can be found in Nataraja Guru's *Unitive Philosophy*, from page 376 on, and I have excerpted the kernel from it in *The Path to the Guru*, on pages 232-3. In his Gita commentary, Nataraja Guru clarifies the relationship:

According to Krishna, who is an absolutist, he is going to show how Arjuna can surmount his duality by the right use of dialectics, by applying this method only to unitive values which come within the scope of contemplation, and not merely for decisions between alternative advantages here in the world of multiplicity and action. Dialectics is conducive to unitive understanding only, and spoils the case when applied to ordinary situations in life where usual ratiocinative methods or logic would be the proper instrument to employ. (112)

The verse 88 commentary is the most excellent explication of how the gunas—sattva, rajas and tamas—affect our life, and also the intent and significance of the four great dictums of Vedanta. Nitya’s elucidations need no amplification, and should be reread just as they are. But let me highlight two points about the first dictum, *tat tvam asi*, meaning “That you are,” or “That thou art.”

First of all, That, or the Absolute, is the mystery of mysteries. It remains elusive no matter how we try to latch onto it. The fact that we can never pin it down is actually a very good thing. Meditation on *tat tvam asi* keeps drawing the mind deeper and deeper into the mystery. To believe you’ve got it figured out would only interrupt the process. Nitya assures us, “Every Guru whispers this great secret in the ear of his disciple, but you can shout it out loud, and still nobody will hear. The secrecy won’t be lost even in a million tellings.”

Then there is another point seldom mentioned, that the order of the words is critical:

The teacher did not say “You are That.” If you first think ‘you’, you only think of your body and the rest of your individuation. To avoid that mistake you are first instructed to meditate on *tat*, and then place yourself in *That*.

So, how do we boil all this down so that we can have something useful to take away? All our churning comes from desire, and this is based on *anya*, the otherness that must be attained. In *sama*, everything is already ours. We are *That* in essence, and *That* is *All*. So we are not being asked to stop enjoying life, as some would imagine, but to enjoy it all the more, knowing everything is ours and we belong to it. Nitya offers a very convincing explanation:

Otherness is the beginning of trouble in the world of the many. Any number of things we don’t think are ours haunt our minds. The mind keeps on saying “How to get, how to get.” We want to get things,

people, and put them in our pocket. Then alone will we be happy. We want to be able to pull them out and say “You are mine. Jump around.” Or walk around or sit around. “See. This is *mine*.” Then we put them back in our pocket. It is so very comforting.

You want to possess. Then you want to dominate. You want to master. There is a powerful joy in all of this.

But to your dismay the other person wriggles away. It causes you great upset, heartburn even. You want to capture and hold on to that fellow, but they won’t play along. It is just like when some silly cat almost comes to you, and then suddenly it turns and runs away. It’s so soft and cuddly, but it never allows you to quite catch it.

We desire things only as long as we know they are not ours. Once something is in our possession there is no more desire for it. Does anyone desire that their father should be their father? No. They take it for granted that he belongs to them. Why should they desire their father to be their father?

As with *sattva*, we are attracted to things that are really beautiful, really worth admiring. But we have been trained all our lives to believe that everything is foreign to us, *anya*, and we have to take drastic steps to annex it. If we simply realized that everything we experience is already a part of us, a profound contentedness would spread through our very bones. Nothing would change, and yet everything would change. We might even be able to treat our detractors as friends in disguise.

The bottom line is: love but don’t crave. Don’t feel needy. As Prabu reminded us, the resolution of all conflict is to arrive at love. Love is unitive, and in the final analysis it is the only thing we can honestly contribute. Possessiveness, and its shadow side, self-abnegation, block the free flow of love. They are learned behaviors we can and should counteract, to let the light in once again.

## Part II

*Neither This Nor That But . . . Aum:*



In the preceding eighty-seven verses many aspects of the Self and the world have been dealt with. After considering all these expositions, if one has a calling to fulfill his obligations in the workaday world, insisting on the reality of transactions, no one can tell him that the world does not exist. In this verse Narayana Guru agrees with such a person by saying that in a transactional sense everything has existence. In the transactional world the polarization is between “I” and “this”; the cognizing consciousness of the individual is on one side and on the other are the countless entities that can be treated as the “other.” As it has been pointed out already, there are two kinds of visions, anya and sama. Seeing each thing separately is called anya, which fixes the status of a separate object, and seeing everything as one is called sama.

A person who sees everything as one is referred to in this verse as a tattvacintagrahan, meaning a philosopher. This Sanskrit term is very suggestive, as it can be split into tat + tvam + cinta + grahan. Tat means “that all-inclusive reality which transcends the scope of being treated discursively”; tvam means “you and whatever is experienced by you,” or, in other words, the content of your consciousness which is the world that you transact with or relate to; cinta, in the present context, means “contemplative reasoning”; and grahan means “a person who grasps the conclusions of his ponderings.” Such being the qualifications of a philosopher, it is no wonder that he sees everything in this world as belonging to the one reality.

In the Upanishads there are four well-known dictums, which are called mahavakyas. One of these is tat tvam asi, “that thou art.” This is also called the dictum of instruction. As a novice in philosophy is expected to meditate on this dictum, he can justifiably be called tattvacintagrahan, one who has properly discerned the relationship between the Absolute and the relative world.

Objects in the external world are varied and separate, or at least that is how we treat them. One might ask what is wrong with

that natural disposition. The answer is somewhat complex. Unity is the essential nature of everything and somehow everything is held together by a force of attraction. This is true of the galactic system and of the molecular universe. What is true of matter in this respect is also true of consciousness. One person is attracted to another because of their essential unity, but, as they outwardly seem to have separate bodies, the idea of the “other” comes to both of them and they desire the other, or at least one desires the other. Desire is a great source of trouble. A person is not tormented by a desire for his own legs or his hands: as they are already his he treats them all as organically one. Similarly, a person does not desire his parents to be his because that factor is to him an undisputed reality. One can, however, feel great attachment for one's parents and great pain may be experienced on the eve of a separation from them, caused by death or otherwise. This attachment is born of the idea of the “other,” and besides desire and attachment, the idea of the “other” can also cause hatred, greed, lust, anger and fear. In this verse, Narayana Guru calls these the revengeful acts of maya.

Maya is another name for prakriti. Prakriti is constituted of sattva, rajas and tamas. The nature of sattva is to spotlight a value; rajas makes the mind fascinated with the value highlighted by sattva and it infatuates the mind with a relativistic coloration; and tamas binds the mind to the object of infatuation and causes an inertial opacity which blunts the vision of value, and, as the light goes, the desired object becomes a meaningless burden. Nature repeats this series by turning the mind to yet another object of desire. A wisdom seeker desires to free himself from the fetters of nature.

Nature's laws cannot be violated. Seeking the Absolute while living in the relativistic situations of nature is as hard a task as navigating a boat upstream against the current of a river. To attempt such a hazardous enterprise, one should know all the intricacies of nature, as nature favors those who know all her secrets, but does not pardon any mistakes whatsoever. The gravitational pull to earth is a law of nature and wing lift is another

law of nature. If, by firing jet fuel, one can create enough lift on a heavy body to surpass the gravitational pull, that heavy body can rise into the sky. Thus, by using two laws of nature we can control the flight of aircraft; however, the slightest mistake can make the plane crash or blow up. This kind of insight is applicable to all the transactions in which nature is involved.

Narayana Guru does not stop a person from his mundane pursuits or from carrying out his transactions, but, in his infinite compassion, he cautions people to be aware of the harsh laws of nature so that they can be used for their own advantage, mundane as well as spiritual.

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Nataraja Guru's translation:

HERE the Guru makes a concession to the standpoint of the common man in everyday life, who is not motivated by any desire to seek ultimate philosophical truth. In the very first verse of the work the Guru took the precaution of hinting that those who are not keen about higher knowledge may not find the work interesting. Realism is not a position that requires philosophical support. Persons who are content with appearances are welcome to lead a life which might be full of errors due to lack of deeper understanding. To avoid error at the gross as well as the subtle levels of human life, one has to take an inward contemplative view of reality. Such a view is what philosophical vision implies. After 87 verses, in which life-problems have been examined in a certain order, the Guru arrives at the notion of Maya, which is the inclusive name given to all the possibilities of philosophical error to which the human mind is prone.

It is true that even in India this appeal to the negative principle of error has been questioned by philosophical schools rival to that of Sankara, who is known as the 'Maya-vadin' (one who put forward

the theory of Maya or formulated it as a part of his doctrine). Ramanuja puts forward seven main objections (anupapattis) to this 'theory' or 'doctrine' of Maya, as it is sometimes alluded to. In fact Maya is neither a doctrine nor a theory. It is only a term which stands for a negative principle of incertitude such as we have examined the nature of in commenting on the two previous verses. Hegel has the concept of 'negativität' with which he supports his dialectical absolutist standpoint. The term is an epistemological and methodological necessity to signify and name all possible philosophical errors under one over-all heading. Idealism and realism cannot have the same accent placed on life-values, although they could have a common frame of reference. Ramanuja gave importance to devotion to God while Sankara gave primacy to wisdom. The difference between them is therefore negligible, as belonging to their particular method of developing the notion of the Absolute. When we remember that the word Maya is known to the Upanishads, the use of the term by the Guru is to be taken as but normal and natural. Maya is not a reality but merely an expression to signify the category of all possible errors in philosophy before it can arrive correctly and methodically at the notion of the neutral normative Absolute. The Guru, in the second half of this verse, recommends an interiorized view that will save the philosopher from getting lost in extraneous details. Bergson's metaphysics recommends the same inner rather than outer view of reality (20)

(20). Cf. p. 1424 'Oeuvres', Paris 1959.

### Part III

Jake's commentary:

Perhaps the most persuasive reason not to bother waking up is the persistence of the world. As Nitya indicates in his opening comments on this verse, "The world has not disappeared. It

persists” in spite of our best efforts to understand or evaluate it (p. 619). In our contemporary world, it would seem that the solution to all the madness lies in stamping it out once and for all. Having corrected the conditions necessary for it, human nature will conform to its new surroundings and heaven on earth established. Unexamined, in this paradigm is the essential character of that human nature and its fundamental correspondence to the world. If conditions designed through human mental concepts dictate or mold human character, then what is produced must be of that same character. By following this cause-effect chain we arrive where we started, a condition that demands more of the same as long as the illusion holds sway, as long as the world remains in place. And in spite of our best efforts, the world remains as it always has been. Our technological advances reveal natural laws that always existed and their discovery *does* alter our relationship to the world but does not alter the world itself. It is this eternal consistency that the Guru and Nitya address directly in verse 88 and its commentary. By turning inward rather than outward, we can “get a grip,” so to speak: “Anyone who wishes for peace, joy, and harmony in their daily life should know it” (p. 626).

Unlike the oneness of the Absolute, our world of necessity contains all manner of forms, names and concepts. The irony in all this variety, Nitya observes, is that they, too, are manifestations of oneness and as such contain a dynamic tension among them—repulsion and attraction. Desire constitutes this fundamental element of prakriti or maya. We desire this and/or are repelled by that as long as we are wholly embedded in the world our senses/mind present and thereby forget or deny the Absolute oneness of the cosmos.

Once we have “signed on” to our materialist world, we’ve replaced the Sat-Cit-Ananda principle for Maya’s alternatives: Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. These three moods—the gunas—writes Nitya, operate in manifestation as a continuous cycle out of awareness (as long as we stay asleep). Maya first offers us a glimpse of truth, Sattva, that we perceive in some thing, idea,

person, etc. that naturally attracts us. We desire to possess that item of attraction. This powerful draw to own is then amplified by the appearance of Rajas, or energy, which, in turn, replaces the original glimpse of the Absolute. Infatuation replaces desire, but the absence of Sattva introduces the third element of Tamas or darkness, inertia and attachment. Where once stood that mote you so blindly “loved” is now a shrew or over-bearing husband whose faults are now clearly delineated. Once this cycle plays out, the “solution” is to cast about for the next glimpse of Sattva to which you can be attracted. And so it goes.

In Western religionist groups this “human nature” is taken for granted, and for Western psychiatry it’s indispensable. As Nitya observes, this cycle is more than individual; “the pattern repeats throughout the whole world. It doesn’t end until the body wears out” (p. 624). (And commences with each new birth.)

As long as we remain asleep, we are inevitably contained in Maya’s play. But even the realized among us deal with it because it endures and exists just as much as the Absolute. The difference between the asleep and the awake is in the recognizing Maya for what she is: “If you know it is the nature of modulations to be transient, you don’t expect them to be permanent. Then you can accept all modulations” (p. 625).

Once we can assume an awake position, the laws of nature, those physically and mathematically precise movements that inhere in nature can be used or avoided when necessary. On the one hand is this nature, Prakriti, and on the other Oneness, *Brahman*. Being grounded in the latter while living in the former places us on that firm un-changing foundation while observing, living in, Maya’s cycles, however fleeting they might be.